1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

with the customs of the Seri), endured for many years and ending at last in unpitied death. 173 563 727

Collectively the cases seem to define a germ, rather than a mature custom, of adoption. In the first case a benefactor (by means regarded as magical) was formally inducted into the reigning family; in the second case the conquering hero (through what were again regarded as magical means) was less formally recognized and venerated, even worshiped, as an all-powerful shaman; while in the third case a representative of the doughtiest alien tribe was enslaved, probably with motives akin to those expressed in the carrying of chargeless guns, the making of imitation machetes, and other fetishistic devices. Except in the first instance there is no indication of consistent custom; but since the entire history of the tribe clearly contradicts regulated adoption of aliens (and indeed affords no other example), it must be inferred that any such custom is intratribal rather than intertribal. 597 563

MARRIAGE

The most striking and significant social facts discovered among the Seri relate to marriage customs. 595

As noted repeatedly elsewhere, the tribal population is preponderantly feminine, so that polygyny naturally prevails; the number of wives reaches three or possibly four, averaging about two, though the younger warriors commonly have but one, and there are always a number of spouseless (widowed) dames but no single men of marriageable age. So far as could be ascertained, no special formalities attend the taking of supernumerary wives, who are usually widowed sisters of the first spouse; it seems to be practically a family affair, governed by considerations of convenience rather than established regulations—an irregularity combining with other facts to suggest that polygyny is incidental, and perhaps of comparatively recent origin. [589] [174]

The primary mating of the Seri is attended by observances so elaborate as to show that marriage is one of the profoundest sacraments of the tribe, penetrating the innermost recesses of tribal thought, and interwoven with the essential fibers of tribal existence. Few if any other peoples devote such anxious care to their mating as do the Seri;[1] and among no other known tribe or folk is the moral aspect of conjugal union so rigorously guarded by collective action and individual devotion. 581

The initial movement toward formal marriage seems to be somewhat indefinite (or perhaps, rather, spontaneous); according to Mashém it may be made either by the prospective groom or else by his father, though not directly by the maiden or her kinswomen. In any event the prerequisites for the union are provisionally determined in the suitor's family; these relate to the suitability of age, the propriety of 584 [582]

[1] Perhaps the closest parallel in this respect is that found in the elaborate marriage regulations prevailing among the Australian aborigines, as described by Spencer and Gillen, Walter E. Roth, and other modern observers.

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

Society

583 Marriage is monogamous. The wife is bought, in spite of the poverty of the Seri. Santa Blanco paid 150 pesos in property for [595] his wife. Chico Romero, a widower, paid more for his, a widow, "because she had three daughters, and a family with daughters is rich" (in expectation of bride prices).

591 The wife goes to live with the husband. A young couple lives with the young man's parents, perhaps in an annex to the house. 562 "The man commands." Chico was emphatic on this point, and repeated that when his son married he would live with him, not with the girl's relatives. Both he and Santo have step-sons-in-law as well as daughters-in-law living with them, but this is because they are chief and boat-owner respectively; (and the sons-in-law are young).

833 Copulation was said to take place immediately on marriage. McGee's statement of a period of continence being cited as the custom of a foreign tribe, the informant obviously wondered and laughed. Intercourse goes on during pregnancy; but not for some months [843] after birth, for fear of a new pregnancy, which would be injurious to the child. A good man respects his wife at all times and does not constantly pursue her.

144 No half-breeds were seen, and the Seri declare they are free of 164 venereal disease.

551 Nothing could be elicited from the informant as to anything like 614 the group-inherited names of lineages, or clans, of the Yuman tribes.

When a woman dies, the widower may give the children to his 768 dead wife's parents to raise. This is the only item learned that might point to McGee's "matriarchate"; but the informant may have been thinking of particular cases. His son lives with him, though he lost the boy's mother.

582 Cross-cousin marriage is as prohibited as that of parallel cousins. This is in accord with the sibling terminology for all cousins; but in view of the present small number of the tribe, the rule must work difficulty.

A man does not marry his dead wife's sister. Apparently he [587] may not. Nor is there levirate. The informant volunteered the question if marriage with step-daughters was permitted by other peoples. Being told of the Navaho custom, he seemed shocked.

606 Neither husband nor wife looks at or addresses either parent-183 in-law. In the isolated, small-group life of the Seri, this rule can hardly be adhered to with complete rigor, and its conspicuous carrying out was not observed; but then everything in their behavior is casual, informal, and slovenly.

607 The kinship system as recorded contains a note as to a woman not addressing her younger sister's husband by kinship term except

2: Kroeber E-5 (1930)1931 NU31 Seri NU31

to prepared defence or attack. The Seri mode of life and induced temperament must have led to many instabilities, with make-shifts often actually more in use, but finished or efficient types of artifact seemingly latent and sporadically emerging in the stream of their culture. Thus, the shell alongside the double-bladed paddle; plain baskets seen in use, but a series patterned in a definite style being produced as soon as their manufacture was profitable; unroofed and roofed houses. Similarly, the two-pointed fish-spear and olla carrying-net, which neither McGee nor I saw, but which may persist in memory in the culture ready for revival on occasion.

Somewhat similar, perhaps, is the status of polygyny, which prevailed in McGee's day (p. 279) a half generation after a disastrous war, but was not the rule, or was successfully disavowed, in earlier times and to-day.

Errors and Misconstructions

McGee dwells at length (pp. 152-156) on three strong trends of Seri life and culture: the pedestrian habit, accompanied by quite exceptional fleetness; a hand and tooth sense with corresponding absence of tool sense; and a race sense unalterably opposed to mixture with alien blood.

All the Sonora and Southwestern Indians were and largely still are fast and sustained long-distance travelers on foot. There is nothing to show that the Seri were superior to the others. The one time they remember having met the Papago in a foot-ball race, they were beaten. Yaqui warfare is a record of at least equal endurance and ability to evade superior civilized forces. In fact the faculties of the Yaqui are the more remarkable in that they have always been settled farmers and often moved in larger bodies. The incredible fleetness of the Seri was probably most manifest in mesquite thickets and on rocky ground. That they should outrun a horseman on an open plain is the sort of tale that one hears on every frontier and which the more intelligent frontiersman does not take seriously.

Hand and tooth sense was undoubtedly strong among the Seri. The same thing, especially as regards food, is reported for the Lower Californians. But the inference of lack of tool sense is erroneous. Knives are prized by the Seri, and, along with nails, axes, and the like, are handled with a direct, crude effectiveness. The crudity is due to the lack of standard, order, and interest in finish which pervades all Seri cultural manifestations and which rests ultimately on their essential isolation and self-sufficiency in an unusually forbidding environment. What a Seri is interested in is not a neat job but one that will substantially meet his immediate need. Their modern plank boats are weak in plan, badly joined, and always leaky; but they serve. A structurally stronger boat would probably profit noth-

535 semi-darkness.

123 Soon two little boys joined the dance, stepping up and down in the sand. Lighted only by the flickering flames of the driftwood fires on the shores of this mysterious and dreaded isle, the soft murmur of the sea as a refrain to the wild chanting, the weird circling of glittering eyes, and wild dark faces, presented a scene of uncanny and savage fascination witnessed by white men probably for the first time.

[533] After each stanza there was a short rest. The singing was similar to most other tribal chanting.

582 836 622 Bob made the remark that the girl was old enough to be broken in by the old Chief. I said, "How?"

583 [838] He said, when a girl thirteen or fourteen has her menses, the Chief takes her and goes through the family act. This is called 'breaking her in'. She is then eligible for marriage. A young man desiring marriage has to purchase the girl by giving the father a boat or rifle, both being necessary to the Seri's existence and protection. At the wedding they have sort of a fiesta and much mescal is drunk, which properly solemnizes a wedding.

585

944 945 When a girl has a baby it usually comes very naturally and easily, but I remember one girl's first baby was three days in coming, and she suffered a great deal. This was on a subsequent trip. She was staying with many of her people on the mainland and someone asked them if they didn't want a doctor or other help. They said: No, they had one. It was a Medicine Man who chanted over the girl and dug hollows in the sand to fit her heels into. He said that the legs had to be kept apart. This was all he did. But ordinarily there is no trouble, and if a baby is born at noon the mother is up and doing, and cooks supper for her lord and master. The men treat their wives with kindness and each shares with the other any delicacy.

[593]

462 [303] [482] In Seriland domestic duties are reversed from the usual Indian methods. The men get the water and the women get the wood. This consists mostly of driftwood gathered along the shore, and it is a picturesque sight to see a string of women and girls bringing in loads of wood in baskets on their heads at sunset.

622 595 There are no plural marriages, but sometimes when a Chief is old, or rather when his wife is old and can have no more babies, he can take a younger woman as his wife. The present Chief is getting old now, almost too old to break in the girls, so they may get a younger man. This might be called the perquisites of office. He takes the cream.

932 825 They hunt lice in the head and eat them. This is said to increase the amorous desires. The penis of the male turtle is cut out and dried. This is pounded and pulverized and placed in the food of the women. This is said to create a desire for a man and the family act.

622 Thus passed a very striking character among the primitive races of Sonora, Mexico. He was brave and fearless in battle; crafty, cautious, and cunning in attack; cruel and merciless to his enemies. He was rarely caught off his guard, and always managed to extricate himself and his men from difficult situations. He was quick to think and act, and was wise with the wisdom learned at first hand on desert and sea from a rugged nature, reluctant to give up her secrets. He was a master hand at *balsa* building, a good hunter, fisherman, harpooner of *cahuama* (sea turtle), a good surfman, a good gambler, and an expert [595] tracker. It was not unusual to possess two or three wives, but the old Chief, while married three times, had only one wife at a time. He was quite fond of the writer, and used to greet him with the true Mexican *abrazo*.

[123] It was in 1922 that I first met the grim old warrior on the shores of Tiburon, whither I had gone on a quest for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New York.

[142] He was very dark, of medium height, thick set, with a broad, deep chest, very muscular, with shaggy brows and deep set eyes which, even at that age, ninety years, burned like coals of fire, and were sus- [302] picious and wary. He wore a braided pigtail down his back which con- [290] tained a few gray hairs. For clothing, he wore a ragged shirt and an [411] old pair of overalls, with a short kilt hanging from a belt, through which stuck a long naked knife of hoop iron, ground on abrasive rocks and keen as a razor.

[291] From infancy to the grave, the freedom of his feet was never [484] hampered by shoes. Even at that advanced age, and until his last illness, he was perfectly able to care for himself, and follow his nomadic tribe on its devious trails along the coast and far in the interior. A walk of a hundred miles was not unusual. For ten rifle cartridges a Seri Indian once walked forty or fifty miles to deliver my message to Juan Tomas. From the time we first met, our friendship was never broken.